

# QRC Factsheet: What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological safety is about creating a workplace culture where individuals can speak up, raise concerns and/or seek help, to enable risks to be appropriately managed.

It is a shared belief across a workgroup, that the workgroup is a safe place where there is interpersonal trust and mutual respect. Members can speak up openly, ask for support, make suggestions, share and receive feedback and express opinions that may differ from others without fear of judgement or reprisal.

Psychological safety also influences workplace culture, innovation and productivity. Research has demonstrated a strong association between psychological safety and learning and performance. It improves workgroup collaboration, innovation and performance and increases job satisfaction and worker retention.

The presence of psychological safety fosters a climate where individuals are more inclined to challenge and report inappropriate behaviours such as sexual harassment, bullying and racism.

## Psychological Safety Drivers

- Leadership style: Authentic, ethical and trustworthy leaders positively impact psychological safety. Leaders model positive behaviours, communicate clear and realistic expectations;
- Conflict management style: Foster respectful communication, show empathy; practice supportive leadership and organisational justice;
- Empowerment: Promote trust and encourage contributions from all workgroup members. Seek workgroup views and provide feedback before making decisions;
- Diversity and Inclusion: Demonstrate support for diversity and inclusion practices where workgroup members feel their skills are being used and valued, that they also have equal opportunity and are treated with respect;
- Context Support: Set clear and realistic goals, along with an enabling workgroup design with adequate resources, information and rewards; and
- Learning Goals: Supportive, problem-solving coaching-oriented leadership that supports non-defensive responses to questions and challenges.

## Fostering a Psychologically Safe and Inclusive Workplace

An organisation's leadership team, including executives, managers and supervisors, all influence psychological safety. These leaders have an important role in creating the right conditions to ensure interpersonal trust and mutual respect. So too, do the organisation's values, policies and practices, with each working in partnership with the other.

While an organisation's diversity plan may drive diverse hiring practices, it does not ensure that the hired individual feels genuinely supported or included. The concept of inclusion extends beyond participation, it encompasses a sense of belonging irrespective of one's race, religion, cultural heritage, gender or sexual orientation.

The sense of belonging can be strengthened when individuals observe leaders, especially senior leaders, who create trust, listen and are respectful in discussions. In addition, the use of inclusive language in a workgroup contributes to this feeling. Recognising culturally, religious or other significant dates further reinforces a sense of belonging.

Incorporating diversity and inclusion principles into an organisation's strategic planning process is essential. This involves emphasising staff education through awareness programs and promoting individual responsibility for leadership in fostering inclusivity.

In parallel, establishing internal systems that can respond to workgroup concerns, ensure consistency in responding to inappropriate behaviours and reinforce a culture of accountability are also important. Prioritising participation in decision-making is essential, along with maintaining consistent and inclusive messaging across internal and external communication channels. Further, building and sustaining support networks and tailored services for diverse groups will foster an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace.

Language use within the workgroup, in publications, websites and social media platforms contributes to a sense of inclusion and consideration of diversity, further supporting an environment where members feel empowered to engage in interpersonal risk-taking.

Commonly used words and phrases can be replaced with more inclusive language. Some examples are provided in the table below.

**Table 1. Language Matters\***

Replace	With
Suffers from (eg disability)	Lives with or has
Disabled person	Person with a disability
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet
Minorities	Under-represented groups
Manning the phones	Staffing or operating the phones
Man hours	Work hours
Husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend	Partner
Mother, father	Parent
Ladies and gentlemen	Everyone, all, assembled guests
Guys (eg hi guys)	Folks, team
Normal	Typical
Chairman	Chair, chairperson
Christian name	First name or full name
Mankind	Humanity or people

\*Government of Western Australia, Psychologically Safe and Inclusive Workplaces: Language Matters, 2021.

This comprehensive approach builds trust and cultivates a workplace culture that embraces diversity, prioritises inclusivity and ensures the psychological safety of every individual, regardless of their role or level within the organisation.

### Further information and resources

- [ES-REA Psychological safety.pdf](#) (act.gov.au) (REA The Impact and Antecedents of Psychological Safety – a summary of the scientific literature, January 2020)
- [What is Psychological Safety?](#) (Harvard Business Review, 2023)
- [What is Psychological Safety?](#) (McKinsey & Company, 2023)
- [Supporting Safe and Respectful Workplaces – the Industry Actions to address the Enough is Enough Report](#) (Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, 2023)
- [Respect@Work toolkit](#) (Minerals Council of Australia, 2021)